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ABSTRACT

In the traditional African society (TAS), the child is allowed to interact with learning materials and situations. Consequently, learning becomes relevant, meaningful, and purposeful in relation to the individual and the society. In the modern African society (MAS), education has been at best an experiment that is marked with inconsistencies in education systems. As a result, the youth are left confused as they are swept from one system to another without the benefit of counseling. In the TAS, the youth are specifically prepared for the occupations they will take when they become adult members of the society. It facilitates their identification process. The youth are given an academic education only as they grow up in the MAS. Therefore, they flock into urban areas seeking employment as soon as they terminate their academic education. They are disappointed at not finding employment because they lack necessary skills. In the TAS, all adult members of society have a "natural" mandate to correct and counsel youth at any time they find them making mistakes or having problems. On the contrary, parents are expected to correct their youth in the MAS. They pass that responsibility to teachers who understand their responsibility as that of giving youth academic education. Youth problems are ignored by both parties. (Author)

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A COMPARISON BETWEEN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN CHILD REARING PRACTICE: WITH IMPLICATION TO YOUTH GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

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A B S T R A C T

A COMPARISON BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN AFRICAN CHILD REARING PRACTICES: WITH IMPLICATION TO YOUTH GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING.

By

DR. SAMMY TUMUTI

The paper makes a comparison between traditional and modern African child rearing practices.

In the traditional African society (TAS), the child is allowed to interact with learning materials and situations. Consequentlv, learning becomes relevant, meaningful, and purposeful in relation to the individual and the society. In the modern African society (MAS) education has been at best, an experiment that is marked with inconsistences in education systems. As a result, the youth are left confused as they are swept from one system to another without the benefit of counselling.

In the TAS, the youth are specifically prepared for the occupations they will take when they become adult members of the society. It facilitates their identification process. The youth are given an academic education only as they grow up in the MAS. Therefore, they flock into urban areas seeking for employment as soon as they terminate their academic education. They are disappointed at finding no employment because they lack the necessary skills.

In the TAS, all adult members of society have a 'natural' mandate to correct and counsel youth at any time they find them making mistakes or having problems. On the contrary, parents are expected to correct their youth in the MAS. They pass that responsibility to teachers who understand their responsibility as that of giving youth academic education. Youth problems are ignored by both parties.

A COMPARISON BETWEEN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN CHILD REARING PRACTICES: WITH IMPLICATION TO YOUTH GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of western culture into African societies has ushered in a process of change with respect to indegenous cultural values within the African continent. One might view the process along a continuum. At one end of the continuum are such ethnic groups as the Masaai of Kenya who hold strongly to African values. At the other end of the continuum are those schooled African elites who have embraced western cultural values in their entirety and in between the two extremes are Africans who have adopted some western cultural values while retaining much of their own traditional African values. On the whole, one must acknowledge that the African society is no longer the same.

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Guidance:

In this paper Guidance refers to informal or formal continuous process that includes all those activities and services provided by the family (or society) and school aimed at helping individuals maximize potentials in self understanding and that of other people, and better adaptation to their environment. For example self management, and how to relate to other members of society.

In African Tradition Society, the family and the entire community are responsible for providing guidance to individuals. They consciously provide guidance to individuals throughout his/her life. Guidance provided is mainly informal.

On the other hand, parents in the modern society provide some informal guidance to their children but they pass much of guidance responsibility to school because of the following reasons:

a) Children spend most of their time in school.

b) It is understood that school has trained manpower such as teachers and counsellors to provide guidance to children.

c) Guidance is assumed to be inseparable from academic education.

Counselling:

Counselling is a word that is commonly used to mean "advise giving". But in a strict sense, the term refers to a process in which an experienced person in life, or trained counsellor interacts with an individual inorder to help that individual resolve a concern (problem) in his/her life.

In an African Tradition Society, counsellors were older and experienced members of the community. They had not received formal training as is the case of counsellors in the modern society.

An Overview of Guidance and Counselling in African Traditional Society

In Traditional African Society, an individual exists in relation to and for the group. This is true of such groups as family, clan, or tribe (Kenyatta, 1979; Mwaniki, 1973). Indeed, the cohesiveness of the extended family is an indepensable value in the African Traditional Society. Members of the extended family are

concerned with the welfare of each individual members. When problems arise, the group seeks ways to provide solutions to the problems at the individual or at the group level. Counselling services are thus readily available to those who need them and, to some extent, each member of the group could be regarded as counsellor. Counselling is largely informal. In general counselling services range from simple advising to tackling difficult problems which call for more experienced counsellors. Such counsellors include older members of the family, elders among clans, or recognized elders within various groups. In Nigeria, for example, such counsellors who are comparable to psychiatrists, are known as "Babalawo" (Ahia, 1983).

Nevertheless, at present, there is an apparent break down of the extended family system. Counselling service in the traditional sense is diappearing rather quickly in many African Societies. Rapid educational, social, and economic changes are occuring in the present African society as has been noted earlier in this article. Consequently an individualistic approach to life borrowed from the western culture is increasingly prefered to the collective approach of early African generations. Each person nowadays is preoccupied with his/her own concerns, yet no longer has traditional counselling help. The youth are severely affected by those changes as they develop to become adults. Hence the provision of formal counselling is needed to help them make the necessary adjustment into life.

A Comparison Between Traditional and Modern African Societies.

In the following paragraphs a comparison between the

Traditional and modern societies is made. There is a two fold purpose for making the comparison. First, it will help us understand why an individual's counselling needs are or are not met in the two societies. Second, it will also help us explore the potential situations that are likely to cause problems to the individual which may be alleviated with appropriate guidance and counselling. The yardstick for this comparison will be three areas namely: academic, occupational, and psychological factors.

For the purpose of this article, a Traditional African Society (hereafter refered to as TAS) is defined as one that has retained traditional customs intact. In other words, it has resisted the influence of western education, customs, and life-style. The Maasai and Turkana of Kenya may be cited as examples. However, it should be noted that some members of the two groups above have embraced the western life-style and education. Such members do not readily fit into the above examples. On the other hand, a Modern African Society (hereafter refered to as MAS) is defined as one that has adopted the western life-style, customs, and education.

Academic Education Factors - TAS

Contrary to the beliefs of most missionaries who thought they brought western education to fill a vacuum in Africa, most researchers have been impressed by the relevance and purpose of the traditional African education (Castle, 1966; Okafor, 1974). In summarizing the aims of traditional African education, Castle (1966) observed.

> Its aim (is) to conserve the cultural heritage of family, clan and tribe, to adapt children to their physical

> environment and teach them how to use it, to explain to them that their own future and that of community depended on the perpetuation and understanding of their tribal institutions, of the laws, language and values they had inherited from the past (p.39).

Education in the TAS is regarded as absolutely essential for youth's social development in preparation for diverse roles they will play in the society as adults. Therefore it starts from the time one is born and ends when one dies (Kenyatta 1979). Its unwritten curriculum is strictly the unfolding stages of development that one passes physically, cognitively, and socially. At each stage of youth's development, they are taught and given an opportunity to experience education that pertains to that stage with an implication to their future membership in that society. For example, as soon as the child is ready, he/she is taught the names of the family members, relatives, and the immediate neighbours and how they are related to him/her. Furthermore they are taught their geneology. Later on in life they will be expected to recite the names of their ancestors starting from their parents and going back several generations. The implication of this education is to introduce and instill the society's philosophy of unity. It is in accordance with this philosophy of society's unity that one's aspirations are shaped and their fulfilment within the society is found.

Therefore, the education of the youth is the responsibility of all members of the society (Castle, 1966). At first the education of both boys and girls is largely the responsibility of the mother. When children are about six years old, the responsibility of education is then shared by the mother and father. The mother continues to teach her daughter(s) skills

pertaining to woman's roles. For example she is taught cooking and childcare skills. The father teaches his sons skills pertaining to man's roles. For example, he is taught how to look after cattle if herding is that ethnic group's main occupation.

Second, the youth join their agemates who teach them various skills such as dancing. Third, the other members of the society are involved in the education of youth whenever opportunities arise. The elders for example, are responsible for the youth's formal education during initiation rites.

In TAS, therefore, the education is characterized by the learner's interaction with the learning situations which make the education immediately relevant, meaningful, and purposeful in relation to the individual and society.

Academic Education Factors - MAS

While the curriculum of education in the TAS is based on the natural unfolding stages of child's development, the curriculum in the MAS is based on psychological theories formulated by western psychologists mainly for the western society. It is not, therefore, surprising that education in the MAS has been, at best, experimental in nature.

The educational curriculum has changed many times. Major changes to match developing policies occured immediately after each African country attained its independence from the colonialists. For example Tanzania's curriculum was changed in 1964 to cater for

its new democratic policies. Kenya changed from the colonial segregrated system of education to a non-segregated system after achieving its independence in 1963. Recently, the 8-4-4 (eight years of primary education four years of secondary, and four years of university education respectively) system of education with a practical bias was introduced in Kenya in 1985.

Minor changes in emphasis have been occuring in the educational system. Specific changes affected subjects such as math and foreign languages, primarily English for former British colonies and French for former French colonies. These languages are the designated languages for instruction. Consequently, mastering them in a prerequisite to the persuit of education in the MAS (Chege & Ergasi, 1973). The major educational consideration in most African states has been deciding the best methodology of teaching of English or French to children and helping them to abandon their vernacular. The curriculum and the methodology of teaching them have changed from time to time according to the recommendations of the latest instructional theory. As a result, poor performance in school and examinations are expected from those youths who do not master the foreign language that is used as the medium of instruction in most African states. In Kenya, for example, old math and new math have successively replaced each other in the school curriculum.

Some subjects in the school have received emphasis over other subjects in order to match each African states individual needs. Science and technical subjects have received such emphasis as each African state reaches the saturation point of the arts personnel

it has produced in its educational system. Recently many African states including Kenya have emphasized technical education as a solution to youth unemployment.

Consequently, these changes, without doubt have left many youths confused as they are swept from one system of education to another. Yet there has been little or not provision for guidance and counselling to ensure a smooth transition for these victims of change. Alienation of youth from the society is possible under the above circumstance.

Occupational Factors - TAS

These youth are mainly taught the trade of their parents. The boys for example are taught the trade of their fathers. If the occupation of the father is herding cattle, the son accompanies his father to look after the cattle when he is about six years old. He is taught different aspects of caring for cattle. He is taught how to locate good pasture and water for cattle. He is also taught how to recognize different diseases that affect cattle and how to treat them using herbs or other forms of treatment. Further, he is taught to recognize the individual animal by name and by its physical appearance. The boy is also tested on these skills.

Kenyatta (1979) reported that among the Kikuyu of Kenya the test of recognizing and counting the number of animals owned by the family was to mix two or three herds together. The young boy was asked to separate his family's cattle from others. If he missed separating some of them, they were described for him and he was asked to try again. In addition a boy was taught how to protect

the cattle from predating animals. Recently, in Kenya, a Maasai boy was seriously injured by a lion when he was looking after his father's cattle. He tried to fight against the lion. When he was recovering in the hospital, he was asked whether he would dare fight against a lion again. He answered that he would if it attacked his father's cattle.

Other trades, such as fishing, hunting, and blacksmithing are taught to the growing boys, at different geographical locations. For example, for people who live near a lake or sea, fishing is most likely their occupation.

Young girls are taught how to care for the family at home. They are taught different trades such as basketry, weaving, or pottery depending on the geography and needs of local community.

Occupational choice is allowed if youth aspires to occupation other than that of the parents. They are apprenticed to a person in the occupation of their choice. If a boy for example, wants to become a blacksmith, while his father is a fisherman, he is apprenticed to a blacksmith. A fee is usually paid in the form of domestic animals or a measure of food.

In this society, the youth receive training as they are growing up in the occupation they will engage in as adults. This education helps them to fit in their society and progress economically.

Occupational Factors MAS

In the TAS youth are prepared for the occupations they will take when they become fully functioning members of their society. In contrast, the youth in the MAS are trained in academic education before they are trained for an occupation. Children in nursery school or kindergarten are specifically prepared for primary school. Youth in primary school, are prepared academically for high school. However, it should be noted that only a small fraction of youth proceed to high school. Nevertheless, the attitude of the youth has been observed to be geared to whitecolour jobs. Farming, for example, which is the mainstay of most African people, is shunned as a job for illiterate people. There is a prevailing belief among the youth and the parents alike that all that is needed is the pursuit of an academic education and whitecolour job will be the result. Unfortunately, the academic pursuit of the majority of the youth is aborted before they complete their schooling. They are knocked out of the academic struggle by the selective national examinations. Yet they still hold hope of getting whitecolour jobs with all the modern amenities of life. Therefore students flock into the urban areas only to find no employment at all, especially not that of their dreams. The 8-4-4 system of education introduced in 1985 by the Ministry of Education in Kenya is geared towards correcting some of the above attitudes. The system offers an opportunity to youth to have practical training in many aspects of production such as carpentry, and crafts. It is hoped that the youth will discover their occupational interest early in their lives and refine their skills as they climb up their academic ladder.

In addition to the practical bias built in the 8-4-4 system, guidance and counselling can be very useful in helping youth explore their occupational interests and aptitudes. Further, it will help in changing the attitudes of these youth towards jobs available in the country, supplying them with information about available jobs and their entry requirements, and informing them of the training opportunities required.

Psychological Factors - TAS

As has been implied elsewhere in this paper, the extended family system plays a significant role in the guidance and counselling of the youth in the TAS. All the adults are concerned with the good behaviour of the youth. Therefore they participate in correcting them when they make mistakes. Problems of the youth are detected early and help is sought at an individual or group level. In this sense, every member of TAS can be regarded as a counsellor.

The value system of the TAS is clearly defined and measures of guarding it specified. For example, the morals expected of the youth are guarded by the adult and the age group. Any youth who violates them is heavily punished by the age group. In some ethnic groups in the past such as the Kikuyu of Kenya, the victim was excommunicated from participating in their activities such as dancing (Kenyatta 1979).

Furthermore, the roles for men and women are specified in the TAS. For example, in the most of African communities women have

monopoly of cooking and doing kitchen chores. Any man who contravenes the above role is in danger of being divorced if he is married or missing a girl to marry if he is single. On the other hand, it is man's responsibility to look after cattle and protect the family. The adolescents are, therefore, not confused in their search for identity. They have already decided on their occupations, and know what roles they will play when they are finally admitted into adulthood through initiation ceremonies.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS - MAS

The extended family system which is the chief agent for the TAS is disappearing rather quickly. It is being replaced by a more individualistic approach to life borrowed from the west. Urbanization, western education, and inability on the part of the individual to provide the economic needs of the members of the extended family have facilitated the demise of the extended family system. Therefore, each individual is concerned with the welfare of his or her own life and that of his or her immediate family.

Child rearing practices have changed drastically. The working mothers, for example, are granted about three months for maternity leave. Children are weaned before the three months are over and bottle feeding is introduced.

The poor child is left under the care of a housemaid. Most of these maids are illiterate themselves and have not learned childcare. They have been motivated to seek housemaid jobs by their financial

needs. Their services are unreliable. They may quit their jobs with short or no notice. On the other hand, they may be fired at any time.

While this paper recognizes the fact that no study on African children is available for the effect of the above situation, Erik Erison's psychosocial theory of child development insists that such inconsistent and different experiences will lead the child to mistrust people and its environment (Reilly, and Lewis, 1983).

Parents expect teachers to provide academic as well as counselling to their children. On the other hand, teachers understand their role as that of helping the child to master an academic education. The public as well as the pupils, judge a teacher's ability on the basis of the number of pupils who pass national examinations with high scores. In Kenya, for example, teachers respond to this expectation by striving to coach their pupils so that they will pass the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (K.C.P.E.) and be admitted into government secondary schools (King, 1974). The misunderstanding that exists between teachers and parents as to who should provide guidance and counselling for their youth contributes to their problems being neglected by both teachers and parents.

CONCLUSION

According to the foregoing comparison, the Traditional African Society with its extended family system is very supportive of

children as they develop from one stage to the next. The constant and consistent interaction between the youth and their learning in concrete situations with relevant materials help them assimilate the learning and make it applicable to their lives. Furthermore, the adult members of the society are responsible for all their youth. Thus guidance and counselling is readily available to the youth whenever they need it. Therefore, the youth in the Traditional African Society are ushered into adulthood fully prepared to play their adult roles.

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